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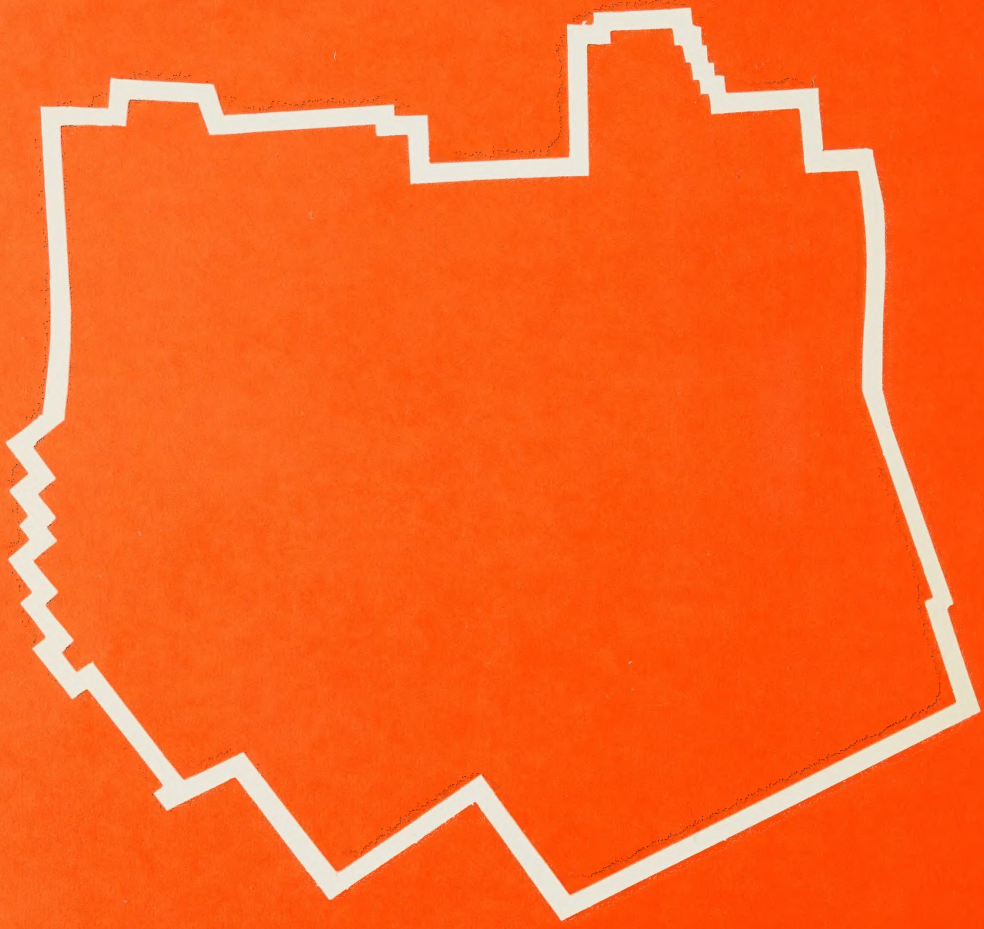
and illustrations. 1961.

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION



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THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

An account of the history, legislation and composition of the National Capital Commission together with an outline of the work, projects and other functions of the Commission

with map and illustrations

PUBLISHED BY THE INFORMATION DIVISION OF THE
NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION, P.O. BOX 81, OTTAWA, CANADA

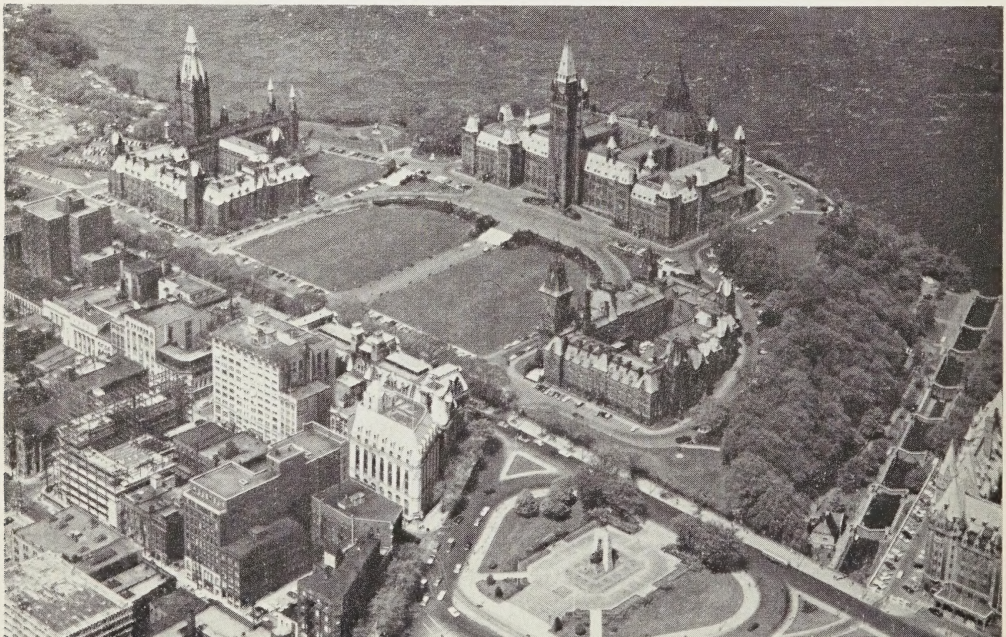
OUR KIND OF CAPITAL

The capital of a country is the seat of its central government. As such it becomes a symbol of nationalism and in miniature represents the spirit and life of its people. London and Paris are examples of world capitals which came naturally into being in the most important commercial and cultural centre in the country. Canberra and Brasilia are examples of another kind of capital, an area that was brought into being on a new virgin site for the seat of government. Here the national governments have complete control of the capital area. Its planners, without consultation at lower government levels, can create fitting conditions to house the legislative and administrative branches of government and to store the nation's artistic and archival treasures.

Ottawa is a third type of national capital. It began as a commercial centre, grew into a typical eastern Canadian urban municipality with its own municipal government, and subject to provincial legislation. It was then chosen to be capital as well. It was chosen as the Capital, not because of its industrial or cultural importance, but because it was thought to be representative of Canada's two basic cultures, and possessed a setting of natural beauty.

The City of Ottawa, as a municipality, has had all the growing pains, problems and frustations familiar to all other expanding urban communities, and has had to live up to its role as Canada's Capital as well. The Government of Canada has established an agency to aid the city in fulfilling its role. This agency, the National Capital Commission, has no authority or control over the City, (this lies in fact with the provincial government), but co-operates with it in developing joint projects that affect the Capital's life and its physical appearance. The NCC is also interested in the development of regional planning and beautification projects, outside the municipal boundaries of the Capital, but within the 1800-square mile National Capital Region surrounding the Ottawa-Hull metropolitan area in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

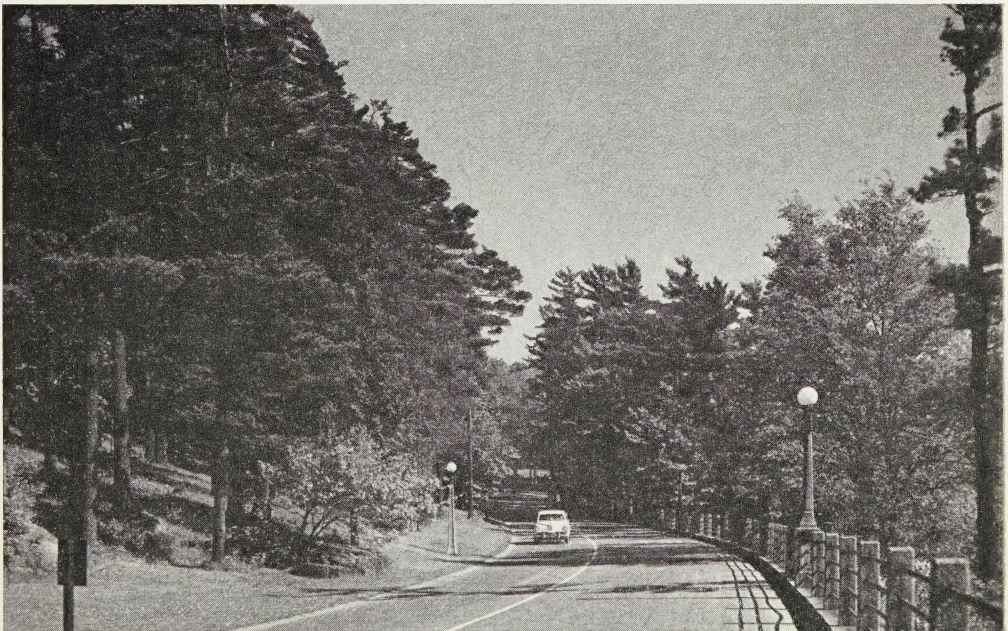
Houses of Parliament and Confederation Square



1899-1960 The National Capital Commission is the direct successor to the Ottawa Improvement Commission. This early Commission, formed in 1899, manifested for the first time the Federal Government's serious interest in National Capital development. The Ottawa Improvement Commission, a small unpaid group of prominent citizens, working with an annual budget of $60,000, began a programme of construction of parks, drives and public squares. Some of the initial work undertaken included the scenic Driveway which runs alongside the Rideau Canal.

During the nineteen-twenties it became apparent that the activities of the Commission were too restricted in scope, and the funds available inadequate, to accomplish the desired results. In 1927 a new act was passed renaming the Ottawa Improvement Commission the Federal District Commission. The Act extended the area of operations of the Commission to Hull; increased its membership to ten, at least one of whom was to be a resident of that municipality; and the annual grant was increased to $200,000 plus a special grant of $3,000,000 for capital projects. Again, in 1945, the government took a further step forward when it retained the services of Jacques Gréber, the eminent French planner, to direct the preparation of a comprehensive long range master plan for the development of the National Capital Region. The next year the membership was increased to twenty to include one from each province. The annual grant was raised to $300,000 and a new capital budget for land acquisition was also established. The present National Capital Act was passed in 1959 under which the National Capital Commission was constituted.

Typical section of early Driveway system



PREVIOUS PLANS The first Ottawa town plan may be considered to be that drawn up by Lt. Col. John By of the Royal Engineers, builder of the Rideau Canal between 1826 and 1832, and founder of Bytown which, in 1855, became Ottawa. The plan laid out a street pattern and reserved certain areas, including one that is now the site of the Parliament Buildings, for the use of the Crown. The federal parks and driveway system developed by the Federal District Commission between 1899 and 1945, while largely staff-designed, was somewhat influenced by a parkway plan prepared in 1903 by the Canadian landscape architect F. E. Todd.

A Federal Planning Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Holt, was established in 1913 to prepare a report outlining a plan to guide the future development of the Capital. The report was completed during the middle of the First World War, which prohibited its active consideration. Changed urban conditions and a new political climate after the war were felt to have rendered the recommendations of the report inapplicable and it was not implemented. Unofficial plans for capital development were prepared during the 1920s by Noulan Cauchon, the Canadian city planner and consultant to the planning committee of the Ottawa City Council. Some of his recommendations were carried out at a municipal level, but the report never obtained official status.

In 1937, the services of Jacques Gréber were first obtained to re-design Elgin Street and Confederation Square, and later his terms of reference were extended to re-plan the grounds of federal public buildings and the central area of the city. Immediately after the war, as a memorial to Canada's fallen in the 1939-45 conflict, he was asked to prepare a comprehensive Master Plan for Canada's Capital. His report, which has come to be known as the "National Capital Plan," was accepted by Parliament in 1951 and has been the Commission's planning guide in the ensuing years.

The National War Memorial

LEGISLATION The current legislation governing the activities of the National Capital Commission is entitled the National Capital Act. "An act respecting the Development and Improvement of the National Capital Region." The objects and purposes of the Commission under the Act are "to prepare plans for and assist in the development, and conservation and improvement of the National Capital Region in order that the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada may be in accordance with its national significance." The Commission has wide powers including the acquisition and development of property; construction and maintenance of parks, roads, bridges, buildings and other works; the right to undertake joint projects with municipalities or make grants to municipalities; construct and operate concessions; and administer historic buildings.
The Commission is also charged with the coordination of the development of public lands in the National Capital Region, and must give its approval before buildings or other works are erected, altered or extended by government departments in the Region. The Commission employs a staff varying between 500 and 700, depending on the season, headed by a General Manager assisted by seven senior officials. The staff includes professional engineers, architects, city and regional planners, landscape architects and surveyors as well as employees possessing allied technical skills.
The current annual budget is $1,954,320 for operation and maintenance; $9,928,500 for capital projects and assistance to municipalities; and $11,711,000 for land acquisition.

NCC refreshment pavilion in Hog's Back Park

COMPOSITION OF THE NCC

The National Capital Commission is a Crown Corporation of twenty members appointed by the Governor-in-Council. Its membership comprises one member from each province, at least two members from the City of Ottawa, at least one member from a local municipality in Ontario or Quebec other than the cities of Ottawa and Hull. Commissioners serve for terms varying from one to four years. The Commission must meet at least three times each year. The Executive Committee consists of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Commission and three other members appointed by the Commission, of whom one shall be from the Province of Quebec. An Advisory Committee on Design composed of prominent Canadian architects, town planners and landscape architects, advises the Commission on the external appearance of Government buildings and other buildings facing government property; and on building location, site plan and landscape design. A Land Committee, comprising several experts in land evaluation, advises the Commission in matters of land acquisition and the policy to be employed in the administration of the many properties that the Commission controls. An Historical Advisory Committee of local experts in the National Capital area advises the Commission in its programme of preservation, marking and interpretation of buildings and sites of historical significance in the Region. There is an Information Advisory Committee composed of Commissioners from several provinces, which considers and reports to the Commission on matters of information and publicity. A small Gatineau Park Committee, composed of three Commissioners, advises on matters pertaining to Gatineau Park and Parkway.

Section of the 1950 Master Model with Ottawa River in foreground

WORK OF THE NCC Growing out of its responsibilities under the National Capital Act, the Commission has continuing work in several annual tasks of operation and maintenance. The maintenance of the grounds of all government buildings in the National Capital Region is a responsibility of the NCC involving new landscape designs where necessary; planting of trees, shrubs and floral displays; maintenance of lawns and roadways, walks and parking areas; and, in the winter, snow removal from government roadways and parking lots.

The Commission is contractor for the Government in the construction of parking lots for all new government buildings.

There are forty-one miles of parkways in the National Capital Region and these are maintained by the Commission.

The 600,000 crocuses that bloom immediately after the snow melts, the more than one million daffodils, and the one-and-a-half million tulips that beautify government parks and parkways are planted and cared for by the Commission's landscape staff. These famous floral displays are supplemented by annuals contributing colour and beauty to the area until the arrival of the winter snow.

The Commission has for some years maintained seven parks in the region, leased from the municipalities, the principal ones being Rockcliffe Park and Strathcona Park. The Commission maintains four more parks of its own. Vincent Massey Park, on the Rideau River at Rideau Heights, is an example of the finest type of urban park design and serves as recreation rendezvous for scores of government, business, social and church groups.

The staff of the NCC, through years of intimacy with National Capital development, are continually studying and evolving with the commissioners the many flexible details and dynamic facets of the National Capital Plan.

Together with a great many minor objectives, the Plan includes five major proposals: The Development of Open Space, The Decentralization of Government Buildings, The Greenbelt, The Relocation of Railways, and Gatineau Park.

In Vincent Massey Park

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The population growth of the twin cities of Ottawa and Hull has been impressive. Greater Ottawa now has a population of 250,803, while Hull has reached 54,302. The whole 1800 sq. miles National Capital Region is populated by an estimated 440,000 people.

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Ottawa-Hull Metropolitan area showing the Cities, Towns, Villages, Townships and Counties in the 1800 square mile NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec

The population growth of the twin cities of Ottawa and Hull has been impressive. Greater Ottawa now has a population of 250,803, while Hull has reached 54,302. The whole 1800 sq. miles National Capital Region is populated by an estimated 440,000 people

Ottawa-Hull Metropolitan area showing the Cities, Towns, Villages, Townships and Counties in the 1800 square mile NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec

OPEN SPACE One of the main endeavours of the National Capital Commission has been to provide a large amount of open green space in the National Capital Region. This has been accomplished by purchasing river and lake-front property, which, in many cases, had been utilized only by sub-standard houses and cottages. These properties, once the dwellings are removed, are returned to their natural state by the judicious planting of trees and shrubs and by establishing turf. Now, many miles of waterfront along the Rideau River and the Rideau Canal, and along the Ottawa River on both the Ontario and Quebec sides, are available for public enjoyment. The public thus may see the beautiful watercourses that flow through the Capital, small parks planned where exceptional views may be obtained and larger parks to accommodate large institutional and family groups. The therapy of open green space is admittedly beneficial to both residents and visitors.

Provision of open space has been further accomplished by purchasing wide rights-of-way for parkways so that, instead of the usual one hundred feet or less, the newer NCC parkways, including the landscaping on each side, are generally 400 feet wide, and wider in some instances. There are twenty-one such miles of parkway now in use in Ottawa, and a further thirty miles of right-of-way has already been purchased for future expansion of the parkway system. Four thousand acres of open space has resulted from the Commission's planned policy of land acquisition in the past ten years.

Vincent Massey Park, Rideau Falls Park, in Ottawa and Jacques Cartier and Brébeuf Park, in Hull are four outstanding examples of the parks thus provided.

Section of new Driveway System

GOVERNMENT BUILDING AREAS

One of Jacques Gréber's strong recommendations was that so far as feasible new government buildings should not be concentrated in the downtown section, but be dispersed over a wider area. This recommendation has been implemented by a policy of co-operation between the Department of Public Works and the National Capital Commission and has resulted in the purchase of large tracts of land on the outskirts of the older city. Since 1945 the policy has been to erect most of the new government buildings on these decentralized sites so that today the majority of the new office and laboratory accommodation for Federal Government functions is being provided away from the congested central area of the Capital.

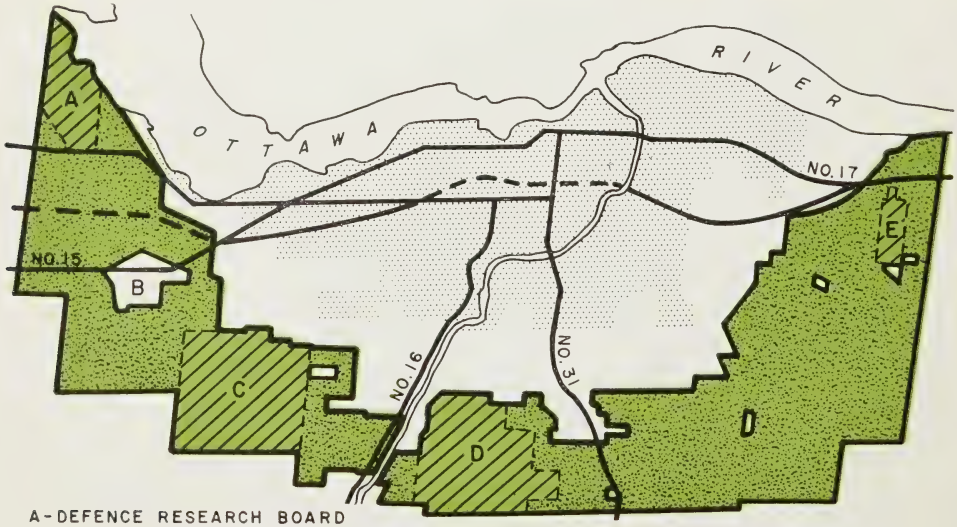
The National Research Council's buildings on the Montreal Road form one such cluster and they have as neighbours the headquarters of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Forest Research Laboratory of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

The new Rideau Heights complex of government buildings in the southern area of Ottawa contains the headquarters of the Department of Public Works and that of the Postal Department. Surrounding sites for several other structures are provided, including a head office for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Tunney's Pasture, to the west and north on the shore of the Ottawa River, accommodates the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, and the headquarters of the Department of National Health and Welfare. Further west a large tract of serviced land, known as Pinecrest, awaits development. Hull, Quebec, is the site of the Department of Printing and Stationery and several other sites for government buildings exist in that city. This policy of decentralization has permitted the setting of buildings in well-landscaped grounds with room for expansion, on main traffic arteries, either already constructed or planned.

NRC complex in eastern Ottawa

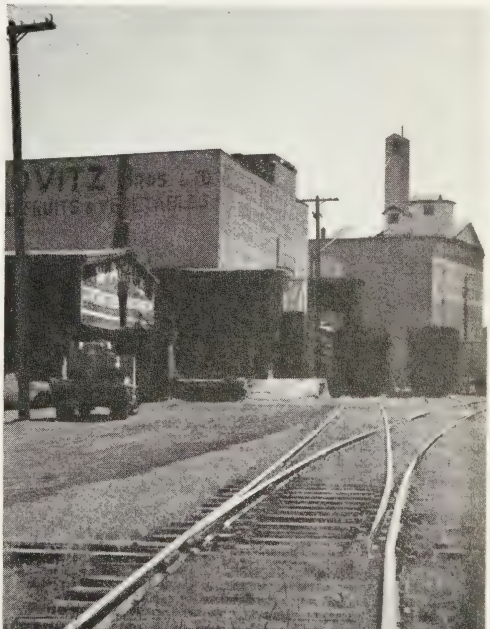
GREENBELT The Greenbelt is one of the most interesting planning measures devised by the National Capital Commission as an aid in controlling the size and shape of the Capital. It was felt that uncontrolled urban sprawl and unsightly and uneconomic ribbon development along the highways at the outskirts of the city would be unfavourable factors in the growth of the Capital of Canada. Further, it was felt that a practical limit existed to the future extension of the central water and sewer services and that accordingly it would be desirable to place a limit on the size and shape of the urban core, and limit as well the population dwelling there.
Efforts of the Commission to establish a greenbelt by persuading adjacent municipalities to establish zoning regulations were unsuccessful. The employment of the device of obtaining agreement on restrictive covenants, was not thought desirable. It was found necessary to purchase the land from the owners at current market prices. This has provided a semi-circular 37,000-acre belt around Ottawa, 2½ miles deep, the inner margin being approximately six miles from the city center. It can be developed under strict federal control to provide space for essential developments in the future. The result has been to physically limit the size and shape of Ottawa, to promote development in the satellite communities, and to encourage urban renewal at the core. Many farms within the Greenbelt are being rented to previous owners, or are being assembled into larger, more economic units. Already some of this land has been used for the site of Ottawa's new airport, for parks and beaches, public golf courses and for the Department of Agriculture Animal Research Institute. Extensive tracts have been set aside for the conservation of water, and animal and plant life, while other tracts will be used for reforestation programmes.
The acquisition and management of the Greenbelt lands constitute a unique enterprise in land planning and development in Canada.

The present 37,000-acre Greenbelt



RAILWAYS All the early planners who tendered advice on the development of the National Capital considered one of the chief problems to be solved was the unplanned network of railway lines that crossed the heart of the city. A by-product of the day when Ottawa was the center of a great lumber export industry and was vigorously encouraging new rail facilities, the railways presented its people in the automobile age with a frustrating total of blocked streets. In addition, much unplanned industry had developed over a period of years in the central area of the city, giving an unsightly appearance to a city which was Canada's Capital. The NCC, after lengthy consultations with the Canadian National Railways and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, finally reached agreement on the removal of the major railway installations, including the downtown central depot and the establishment of a new Union Railway Terminal. This work will see the progressive removal of 35 miles of track from the central area; the elimination of 70 level crossings; the release of 251 acres of land that can be utilized for new parkways and highways; and 198 acres of former yards that can be made available for redevelopment projects of direct benefit to the appearance and life of the Capital. The new Union Railway Passenger Terminal is planned 2½ miles south of the present site, and grade separation structures are planned in connection with city streets which will cross the single track that is to remain. The results of this railway relocation programme are already evident in the utilization of one abandoned right-of-way of the CNR for the building of the Queensway, which is nearing completion; and in the new freight terminal facilities that were built for the CNR in the vicinity of the Walkley and Russell Roads to replace the old right-of-way and freight and express sheds in the center of Ottawa.

Better use of land results from railway relocation



GATINEAU PARK The development of Gatineau Park is the fifth major proposal of the National Capital Plan and envisages a 75,000-acre park across the Ottawa River north of Hull in the pre-cambrian Gatineau Hills in the Province of Quebec. Land purchase for this park commenced around 1937, and all but approximately one-quarter of the land required is now in Crown ownership. The park is shaped geographically like a wedge with its point penetrating into the heart of Hull. It is thirty-two miles long and fourteen miles wide at the base. It contains four major lakes, Meach, Harrington, Philippe and Lapêche. About forty smaller lakes dot the entire area, all containing black bass and some trout. Fishing is allowed in accordance with provincial law. The character of the country is typical of the Canadian forest. The area is mostly covered by deciduous trees, but there are also some stands of conifers, and throughout the area single sentinels of pine, spruce and hemlock are reminders that this was once a vast evergreen forest. Wild life in the park includes beaver, raccoon, porcupine, squirrel, fox, bear and deer; and, since it is a game and bird sanctuary, all species are protected for the delight of the nature lover. To provide access to the park, Gatineau Parkway is being constructed and of this, fifteen miles have already been paved, leading direct from Hull into the interior of the park. Many look-outs, parking and picnic areas permit travellers to enjoy the scenic beauty of the area to the full. At Lac Philippe, at the north end of the park, accessible by provincial roads, a large day-use camping area has been developed, and swimming, boating and fishing are enjoyed by thousands every weekend in summer. In the winter, the Ottawa Ski Club operates a 400-acre tract of land near Old Chelsea in the heart of the park, with several T-bars and rope tows as well as numerous lodges and a large parking area to serve the Club's 10,000 members.

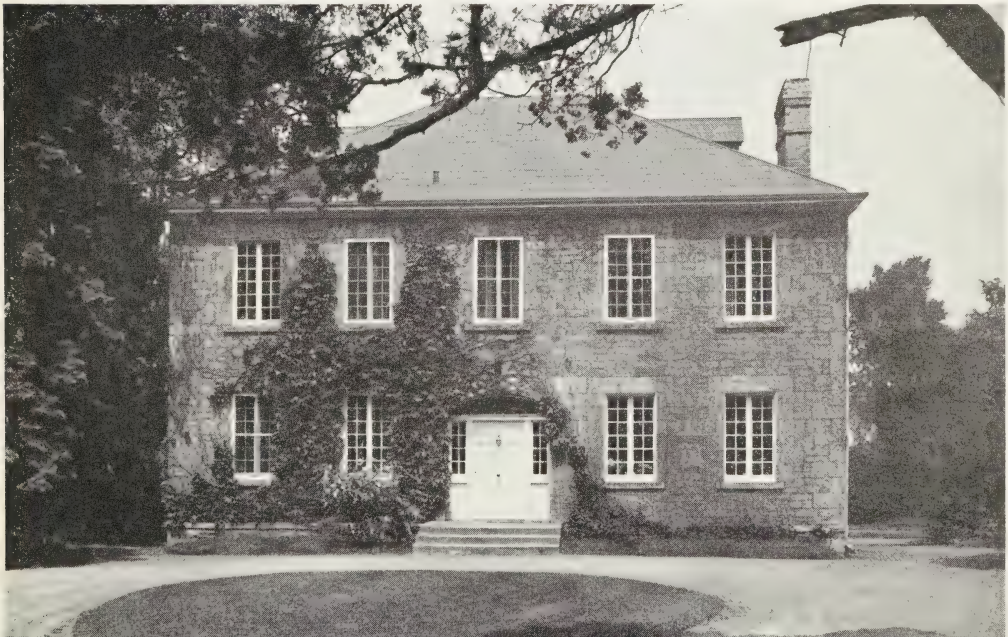
The Gatineau Parkway

OTHER FUNCTIONS Apart from the continuing maintenance activities of the NCC and the basic proposals of the National Capital Plan, there are a variety of other activities that come within the ambit of the Commission's interests.

Planning aid to municipalities in the National Capital Region is given in the form of advice on establishing areas of subdivision control, preparation of basic plans and maps, master plans for communities and zoning legislation. This advice is available to the various municipalities upon request and the Commission, having no planning powers, must seek to persuade rather than impose its proposals. Its planning staff have served a score of local municipalities in this capacity with varied success, and advice to many of them is continuing. The Commission is represented by senior staff on the Ottawa Planning Area Board and most other important technical committees of the cities of Ottawa and Hull, which are concerned with planning and the development of the metropolitan area. Industrial development is encouraged by the Commission by advising industrialists on plant location and other problems related to setting up new plants. Adequate areas of land have been purchased and set aside for industry. Much of this land will be used by industries that have been displaced due to the railway relocation programme. Sites are available for other new enterprises wishing to locate in Greater Ottawa, although most of this land is as yet unserviced. The inventory, marking and preservation of historic sites and buildings in the National Capital Region is a new interest of the NCC and an extensive programme in this field is under way.

Tourist promotion is aided by the Commission indirectly by the provision of many attractive features around the Capital area and by provision of sites for tourist information centres. Assistance is also given in the production of certain literature that is used by the City for tourist promotion.

Thomson-Cole house built in 1834



JOINT PROJECTS The normal growth pattern of the City of Ottawa has been altered and accelerated by the fact that it is the seat of Government for Canada and the additional fiscal burden has been recognized in the form of financial aid to the city in a variety of projects. Such aid has been for those projects which are believed to have been required in advance of their normal need and the National Capital Commission and its predecessor Commissions have tried to help city development by aiding in these projects. The construction of the Mackenzie King Bridge, the Chaudière Bridge approaches, the Bytown Bridges on Sussex Drive, the widening and reconstruction of Sussex Drive itself, the construction of the George Dunbar Bridge over the Rideau River and of the Bronson Bridge over the Rideau Canal, are examples of this type of project. The financial contribution of the Federal Government in most of these projects is a substantial share of the cost, with approval of the appearance and design by the Commission, being a condition of the grant.

The Township of Nepean has also been recipient of NCC grants for a trunk sewer running to a sewage disposal plant. This part of the Commission's work is not widely recognized and is unique, since federal subsidy for municipal public works is not considered generally to be a federal responsibility. Such subsidy is justified only in the National Capital Region because it is being developed for all Canada as a fitting expression of nationhood. The largest joint project of this nature is the Queensway. This is a limited east-west access throughway from one side of Ottawa to the other; a united venture of the National Capital Commission, the Ontario Department of Highways, the Trans-Canada Highway Division of the Federal Department of Public Works and the City of Ottawa. The NCC contribution in this instance is provision of the right-of-way within the city limits and an undertaking to landscape the highway within those limits.

One of the Bytown bridges over the Rideau

CONCLUSION The renewal of the urban core of Ottawa is a current study that has wide ramifications. Much land in the center of Ottawa, some of which is held by the federal government, is ready for re-development. Studies are being undertaken to arrive at proposals for the new construction that will meet the status and needs of the Capital of Canada.

This is one of the current and demanding projects now engaging attention of the National Capital Commission, the Crown Agency charged with the "improvement of the National Capital Region in order that the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada may be in accordance with its national significance."

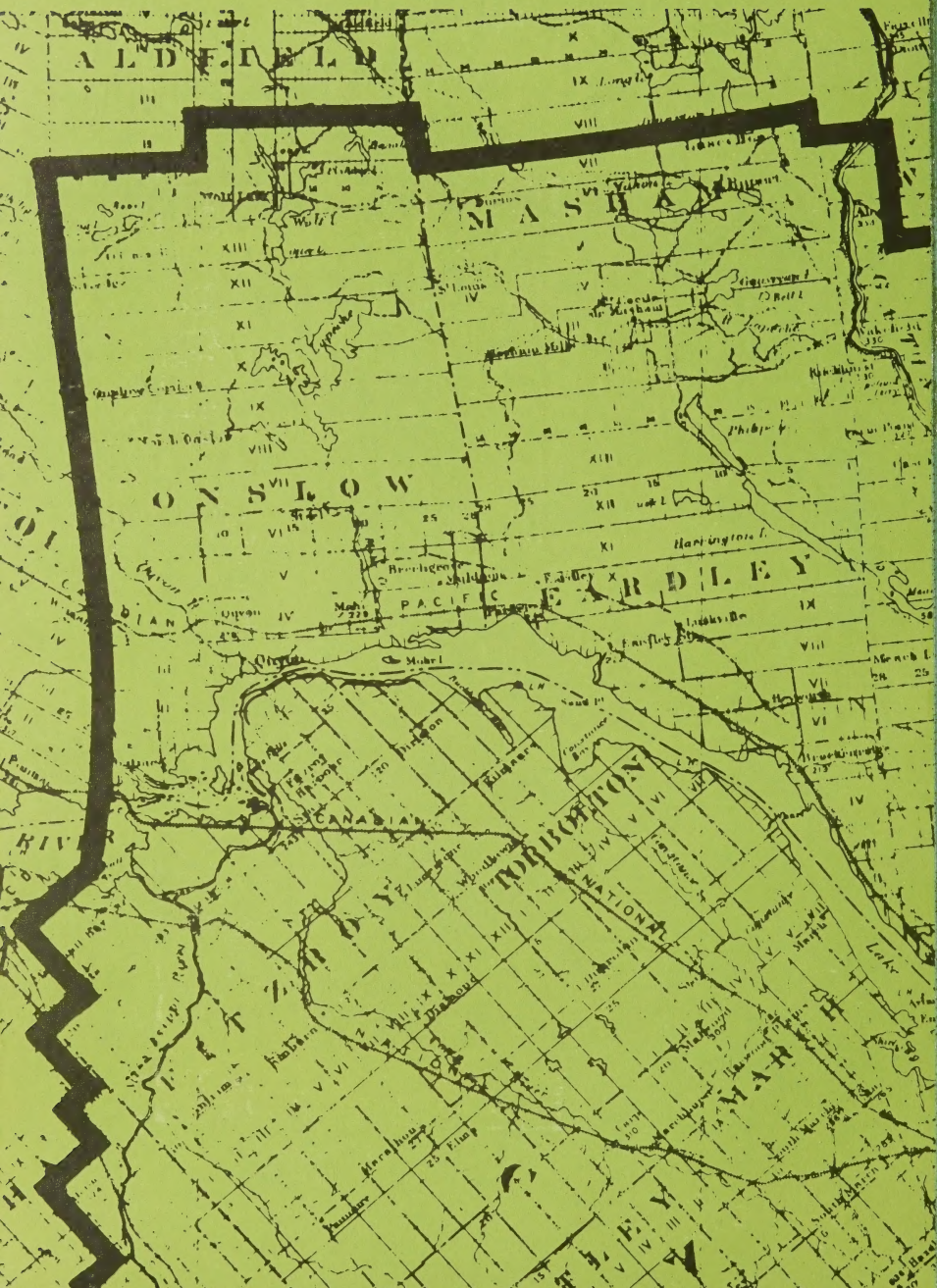
Canada is a youthful nation. Just approaching its second century as a Federation, it will undoubtedly develop dynamically in future years. Ottawa, the Capital of Canada, an important metropolitan area, set centrally in a region that comprises two large portions of Ontario and Quebec, will certainly share materially in this development.

To the limit of its present constitutional powers, and with its long history of planning and development activity, the National Capital Commission has a key role to play. By co-operation with the local municipalities, by ensuring proper use of federal lands, and by developing its own lands, the NCC can make a significant contribution to the enhancement of Canada's Capital.

It has been said that if the Federal Government had greater legal powers which would permit it to successfully impress certain of its ideas on the municipalities in the National Capital area, the task of Capital development would be simplified and accelerated. While this might be the case, the constitutional difficulties raised by this suggestion would make it appear that, for the foreseeable future, Canada's Capital will very likely continue its development as at present; that is, by indirect methods, by subsidizing where it appears justifiable, by co-operation in planning, and by the planning and development of federal lands by the Government itself, through its agency, the National Capital Commission.

Section of 1960 Model showing NCC proposals for redevelopment

THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMIS



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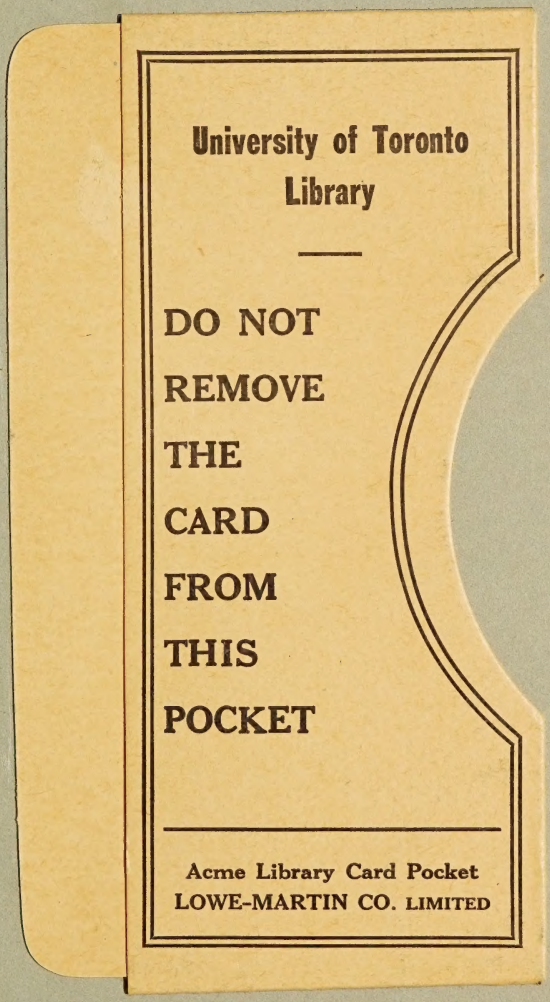
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